

Back to Basics

Help customers party all day, every day of the year

By Haley Beiter | Special to Party & Paper

Holidays are certainly fun and exciting — and the fuel to every party business — but there are at least 362 days in the year outside of Halloween, Christmas and New Year's. To keep customers coming in the store year round, owners must walk a fine line between offering a basic product foundation for any and every party and not letting that aisle of basic products grow dusty and boring. Follow these tips and

advice to make sure your store can create an amazing party for every customer, every day of the year.

How to Start

While Halloween may pack a powerful sales punch, basic party supplies are a must. They can be used for any party fathomable, and yet a plain, solid-colored plate doesn't seem that exciting. But it can't be ignored, as even the dull, everyday supplies have their place in sales.

colored balloons (and other party supplies) in stock to coordinate with the bride's color scheme."

"It is important to maintain the basic product line to satisfy the customer's vision," said Jillian Svenjak, Amscan's marketing coordinator. "Developing 'centers' for solids, personalization, premium and mini products gives the customer options and the ability to mix and match to create their ultimate customized celebration."

If your everyday products are feeling a little lackluster, try these tips to get customers excited about generic supplies.

Mix and Match

Letting the customer use everyday supplies to build a party that's specific to them is ideal, so always make sure your inventory allows them to mix and match. This keeps products versatile throughout the year, and even during busy holidays.

Adriane Brandenburg, co-owner Fun Party & Wedding Services in Shawnee, Kan., said having a well-stocked every day party aisle is vital.



10 pcs - 0.5 fl oz (14 mL)



10 pcs - 2.3 fl oz (68 mL)

"Basic products like solid-colored latex balloons are great for customizing designs in the recipient's favorite color, and they also come in handy for graduations and other school-specific events that occur year-round," said Lisa Bennett, Pioneer Balloon Co.'s product management director. "If you do a lot of wedding business, it's good to have a lot of solid-

Mini tableware styles from Amscan feature a clear, contemporary styling that fits with any party décor.

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**Adriane Brandenburg
Co-owner Fun Party & Wedding Services**

“We have to keep in stock all the basics to go along with any and every party event,” Brandenburg said. “We stock 30 solid colors in a higher quality and about 15 in a ‘budget’ line. Some of the colors overlap, but the exact color might match a theme better. People might not want to spend the money to buy both licensed plates and napkins and so offering a coordinating solid is a cost effective alternative.

“It is really hard to compete with dollar and discount stores for such

basics, so it is imperative to keep prices competitive,” she continued. “It’s also important to have a wide variety and include what are now everyday themes that cannot be picked up everywhere, such as retirement, 21st Birthday, bachelorette, etc.”

Spice it up

Basic party supplies do not simply mean solid colors. Add fun patterns and shapes to your product line-up, like square plates and zebra-striped napkins.

Adding variety to everyday supplies gives the customer more opportunities to build their own party. And having that variety, as Brandenburg has seen, keeps your offerings feeling updated and unique.

“I will admit it is hard to keep simple things exciting,” Brandenburg said. “However, mixing the solid pink items in the store with the breast cancer awareness display or the solid color plates with all the fun trendy animal prints are what we do to make sure people know we have what they need in a ‘one-stop shop.’”

Bennett added that Qualatex offers several unique products that add excitement to any party, and that their stretchy plastic Bubble Balloons, as well as Diamond Expressions Microfoils and Diamond Accents Microfoils, are available in a variety of designs for different everyday occasions.

“The new line of Holographic Microfoils also features designs with bright colors and fun expressions for a one-of-a-kind look in holographic technology,” she added. “With all of these balloons, it’s important to inflate and display them in your store to encourage sales.”



**When Jim Johnson died on
November 5, 2011,
our industry lost a great friend.**

**We will miss his friendship, his support,
his never-ending smile.**

Rest in Peace, Jim





A new line of Holographic Microfoils from Pioneer Balloon Co. features designs with bright colors and fun expressions.

Svenjak added that the new minis are a hot trend for everyday products.

"Amscan is now offering a variety of mini tableware styles including mini tumblers, square plates, curved plates, bowls, spoons and forks," she said. "We even offer high count value packs. Also the elegant tasteful packaging uses photography to call out great ideas for these items."

Show the Customer

You have the product, now do what giant retail stores can't — show customers how to use those products in creative and fun ways with your window and merchandising displays. Bennett noted it may take a little effort, but is worth the time.

"Temporary merchandising units and revolving displays are easy and fresh ways to keep your customers coming in for new ideas. There is a commitment of pre-planning to reap the benefits of these add-on sales, but the

profits are well worth the effort," she said. "Plan a merchandising schedule around holidays and seasonal events, where you keep a display up no more than six weeks. For those 'empty' time periods between holidays, promote a specific theme for that time of year or special everyday events."

Bennett suggested highlighting birthdays in July and August and seasonal bridal displays and baby showers during non-holiday months. And try displaying products while directing store traffic. "Using inflated balloons to direct customers to corresponding themed areas of your store is also a great way to grab attention and increase balloon sales."

Expertise

Big-box stores often tout the expertise and knowledge of their employees. Customers can go to Lowe's for a class on how to install tile, or learn different painting techniques from someone in the paint department. There's no reason this valuable customer service can't be offered at party stores.

So have fun. Offer a Saturday class on making table centerpieces from generic colored balloons. Have another lesson on creating fun table setting. Most importantly, have the knowledge base within your staff, even if it means investing in their training. An employee with no knowledge won't impress someone looking into how to decorate

their cake, but someone who has experience and tips is more likely to make an impression and make a sale — now and in the future.

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A knowledgeable staff also goes a long way in quality customer service that is seemingly non-existent in a big-box retail store. It's that personal customer service that can make all the difference.

"We all know you can't compete with the prices at Wal-Mart, however, we can compete with service," Brandenburg said. "There are still a lot of people who prefer to shop local and appreciate customer service. We have 'mature' ladies shopping for their church event or family reunion who love to have their hand held and enjoy having that one-on-one service. You won't find that a big box store.

"Having those special touches help — something as simple as putting our balloons in bags can keep someone from shopping at the competition," she continued. "Making everyone feel like family and showing that you appreciate their business goes a long way. When people have a choice of where to shop, I like to think they want to spend their money at a place where they not only get value but enjoy the experience and feel like family."

In other words, basics are best—in product and in practice—for successful everyday sales. **P**